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ABSTRACT

This interpretive research explores five first graders' perceptions of reading and of being readers, asking the questions: What does reading or being a reader mean to a group of children who are at the end of first grade? What do they see as its purpose? and How do they view themselves as readers? The data are presented in the form of narratives describing the children and their views, followed by a discussion of the children's reading identities and purposes for reading as condensed into five categories: practice, people, power, pleasure, and performance. Practice, a main purpose for the children, entailed reading longer words and books, learning more words, and developing decoding skills. Reading as a social process included connections to people, both while being taught to read and when sharing texts with others. Mastery of reading provided varied feelings of power and control either over general textual ideas or over the words themselves. Pleasure and humor were emphasized in relation to children's reading, while instrumental motives were attributed to adults and to teacher-directed activities. Performance allowed for a display of knowledge and skills, but brought fear of ridicule for some. (Five appendices include interview questions and children's narratives. Contains 55 references and 12 children's books.) (Author/KB)

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"I get proud when I read": First graders talk about reading

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Abstract

This interpretive research addressed five first graders' perceptions of reading and of being readers, asking the questions: What does reading or being a reader mean to a group of children who are at the end of first grade? What do they see as its purpose? How do they view themselves readers? The data is presented in the form of narratives describing the children and their views, followed by a discussion of the children's reading identities and purposes for reading as condensed into five categories: practice, people, power, pleasure, and performance. Practice, a main purpose for the children, entailed reading longer words and books, learning more words, and developing decoding skills. Reading as a social process included connections to people, both while being taught to read and when sharing texts with others. Mastery of reading provided varied feelings of power and control either over general textual ideas or over the words themselves. Pleasure and humor were emphasized in relation to children's reading, while instrumental motives were attributed to adults and to teacher-directed activities. Performance allowed for a display of knowledge and skills, but brought fear of ridicule for some. The children's rich perceptions of the reading process and of themselves as readers can guide educators as they support children in becoming strong, positive, and lasting readers. More in-depth qualitative research needs to be done on children's perceptions of reading at all levels of schooling, especially with beginning and struggling readers.

Reading is basic to most of what children do in school, and success as readers is inextricably tied to overall success in school. Following over two decades of work on children's perceptions of various aspects of schooling (e.g. Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Duke, 1977; Klein, Kantor, & Fernie, 1988; Weinstein, 1983; Wing, 1995), there is still much to be learned about how children perceive of themselves as readers and how these perceptions influence their interactions with books and their ideas about reading. It has been found that children's views will shift across time and experience, often depending on their classroom and school environment and on the method of and ideologies driving a particular teacher's reading instruction (Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993; Cairney & Langbein, 1989; Johnston, 1997; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996). Because of the complex interaction between instructional methods and beliefs and children's views, it is essential that we as teachers take the time to listen to children's perceptions in order to increase our understanding both of them and of ourselves. By talking with them we are alerted to areas of high motivation and to areas of need. We are better able to build on their knowledge and to help them broaden their interests. This study provides one example of how we can reach out to young readers for their insights, and how we can process that information for ourselves as teachers, in order to find meaningful ways to guide their further literacy development. The purpose of this research, then, was to begin to understand how particular first graders viewed themselves in the context of reading. My questions included: What does reading or being a reader mean to a group of children who are at the end of first grade? What do they see as its purpose? How do they view themselves readers?

On leave from my own elementary teaching position, I was initially a reading volunteer in the first grade class involved in this study. I read to the children and listened to them read, watching them struggle to decode words or read with deliberate fluency, and I was amazed at

their discussions. Some were openly excited about their abilities, others not aware of what they could not yet do. For one child who did not pause at his miscues, I got the impression that because reading did not make much sense to him, he had no reason to get upset about the incoherence of that particular book. Another child was so excited he asked, "Can I read this?", pointing to the back cover of the book he had just finished. One was so concerned about accuracy he would read and reread one sentence until he felt sure he had the whole thing correct. Some children chose long and difficult books, seemingly to challenge themselves, while others picked those they could read with confidence. One child searched long in the book stack before triumphantly exclaiming, "I know I can read this one!" Some responded to my inquiries about why they liked or disliked a particular book with blank stares, some with details on their favorite parts, and still others revealing their task-oriented stance ("It's too long.") or need for success ("I can read it!"). One, like my six-year-old self, wanted only the comfort of being read to. While I had the opportunity to witness many reading strategies, some effective, some less so, I became increasingly curious as to how these disparate readers saw themselves and the reading process.

Theoretical Framework

Using a social constructivist framework, I investigated how children at the end of first grade constructed images of themselves as readers with a purpose. According to Lincoln (1995) this approach, "seeks no single, 'true,' social reality, but rather focuses on the meaning-making activities of individuals and groups who must make sense of the contexts in which they find themselves" (p. 92). Through these insights, individuals and groups can create new knowledge and develop a feeling of agency and empowerment about their own learning. Reflecting ideas discussed by language theorists (e.g., Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1934/1987, 1978) and literacy researchers (e.g. Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993; McCaleb, 1994; Dyson, 1993), I agree

with Oldfather and Dahl (1994) that "literacy is a social accomplishment" (p. 139), that learning is "an active construction of meaning by learners" (p. 140), and that "language is at the heart of all these processes" (p. 140). Oldfather and Dahl wrote about the "constant tension and confluence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural aspects of the individual's learning and motivation" (p. 140). In this research, I focused on the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains of children's perceptions of themselves as competent readers. In the intrapersonal domain, an individual constructs concepts of both a current and a potential literate self through interaction and meaning negotiation with others (in the interpersonal domain) and develops "beliefs and values concerning the nature of literate activity"(p. 150).

Many theorists and researchers have focused on the social influences that affect literacy. As Cairney (1988) stated, "Every reading event occurs within a rich social context, part of which is the shared beliefs that participants have concerning reading, materials, and instruction" (p. 420). Mead (1995) described how individuals in a social group, through internalizing the attitudes of others or by taking on certain roles experienced in their social groups, begin to know themselves as others view them and as members of a particular group. Along these same lines, Gee (1990) talked about identity kits that individuals construct as members of particular social groups. These kits are collections of the language and general ways of being that together constitute the rules of membership and conduct expected for the group.

Just as Halliday (1973) noted that children do not learn language in abstraction—rather they learn language together with its uses—so too do they learn reading as an activity with a purpose. By finding out from children what those purposes are, educators can build on students' understandings in ways that invite them into ever more involved membership in what Smith (1988) called the literacy club. Smith made a convincing case that we learn to read when we feel

included as members of this club and have opportunities to see ourselves as competent readers who read real texts for real purposes. As novice members join, their learning is encouraged and aided by more expert members in a social atmosphere. The feeling of belonging socially provides an atmosphere in which our literacy practices can expand to their fullest potential. Children do not learn to read and write in a vacuum. They learn by watching, listening, and participating in a literacy club. What they see others reading and the uses they see for literacy make a difference in how they come to view themselves as literate beings and to develop their own sense of the value of literate activities. By asking, "How much risk and punishment, failure, or embarrassment would anyone run in order to learn in any club—before learning that the club itself might be hazardous?"(p. 9), Smith made an essential point. If reading is seen as boring and endless drills, if it is unconnected to meaningful contexts, or if labels such as "poor reader" cause children to question the risk-benefit ratio of seeking membership in the literacy club, then their growth as readers and writers will be severely hampered.

Vygotsky's (1934/1987) work on the social nature of speech and the need for working collaboratively with more capable peers supports this claim. Language is first and foremost social –whether it is written, spoken or thought. We interact with others through language and gradually learning on this interpsychological plane is transferred to the intrapsychological plane and becomes language for oneself. However, not only are we connected through language as we communicate socially in a particular setting in the present, but, as Bakhtin (1986) argued, our words are also tied to previous contexts in which they have been uttered. When we use language, even in our heads, we are dialogically connected to other speakers, readers, and thinkers across time and space. Language is social in all contexts.

Writing about the role of motivation in learning, Eccles (1983) developed an

"expectancy-value theory" that described how "motivation is strongly influenced by one's expectation of success or failure at a task as well as the 'value' or relative attractiveness the individual places on the task" (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996, p. 518). Echoing Oldfather and Dahl's (1994) reminder that children's "learning processes are inherently connected to their identities, their values, and their meaning construction" (p. 149) and that "literacy learning and motivation are inextricably bound" (p. 155), Gambrell et al. (1996) stressed the need to understand "how children acquire the motivation to develop into active, engaged readers" (p. 518). Engaging in literate activities which allow for self expression (e.g., choosing books or describing meaningful personal literacy events) "seem(s) to serve as a mirror in which learners see themselves as literate persons through their reading and writing accomplishments. Thus, self-expression is a key feature of the social interactions that support learner motivation" (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994, p. 149).

Though Smith optimistically stated that children "who are in the club—who see themselves as readers and writers, and who read—will become literate without any further direct help" (p. 124), it is not uncommon for a young child to believe that she or he is a member or to be actually accepted as a member by some, only to find out through later negative experiences that others may deny her or him club membership. Maintaining membership can indeed be risky. Not all expert members exhibit the acceptance that Smith found was essential. Our identities are neither fixed nor necessarily cumulative. Members, novice or experienced, may drop out or not progress if they are left without guidance after initial entry into literacy or if their self-expression is curtailed. Smith's point is, however, well-taken. We do need to focus on children who, for whatever reason, do not see themselves as literate beings. In addition, however, we need to attend to those who do, listening to what the membership means to them and learning from them ways

to support their continued growth as well as ways to guide other children into the joys of reading.

Related Research Literature

Interviewing her children at the end of kindergarten, Edwards (1994), a whole language teacher, found that they had clear views on learning to read. Most demonstrated a high level of self-confidence, feeling positive about reading. Some believed not only that they could read, but that they had learned on their own and, in many cases, before coming to kindergarten. These children "believed practice…was the single most important factor in learning to read" (p. 139). They were able to talk about both the reading process and the perceived results of reading.

The last few decades have lead to changes in the classroom and in how reading is taught that allow us to question earlier notions that children are cognitively confused when learning to read (Vernon, 1967) or that data from young children will necessarily be too vague to be of use (Reid, 1966; Weintraub & Denny, 1965). Reid (1966) found that five year old children had very limited understandings of the reading process. Studying first graders, Weintraub and Denny (1965) found that one-fourth of the responses to the question "What is reading" did not reveal any awareness of a logical purpose for reading. Johns and Ellis (1976) got a high number (39%) of non-committal responses from their participants (e.g., "I don't know") when they asked "What is reading?" They also concluded that the majority of children in their study (grades 1-8) had little understanding of the reading process beyond its purposes as a decoding task.

Later research has contradicted the notion that five-year-olds have "only vague notions about reading" (Cairney, 1988, p. 421). Cairney tried to correct for methodological problems he saw in previous research, problems that stemmed in part from the type of questions asked, by asking a number of specific questions regarding students' perceptions of reading as related to learning with a basal reader. He found that when judging self, others, and teacher-orientation,

"children rely heavily upon assessment of their decoding, vocabulary, and accuracy of reading" (p. 423). Some responses "indicated that success is seen to be related to the amount of reading they did" (p. 423) with "little emphasis upon meaning" (p. 424). He concluded that "dysfunctional notions about literacy" have children placing "great emphasis upon decoding, vocabulary, and accuracy" (p. 427) as opposed to seeing "meaning as important." This supported similar findings by Johns and Ellis (1976).

Researchers have also written about the importance of listening closely to children's views on reading. After looking at some differences in comprehension strategies used by "at-risk" readers as opposed to more able readers, Padak, Vacca, and Stuart (1993) determined that "children's views about reading may be related to what they do as readers" (p. 363), noting that "if students view reading as difficult drudgery, they may decide that they prefer not to exert that kind of effort" (p. 365). Padak et al. also said that if the "goal of reading is to remember snippets of information so that the teacher's questions can be answered" then readers "may conclude that products are more important than the process or that being the best is the goal" (p. 365). They called for researchers to "talk with at-risk readers about their perceptions of reading and reading instruction and listen to what they have to say" (p. 356). In a study of pre-schoolers (ages 3-5), Saracho (1984/1985) stated that "children can be taught to read, but may refuse to read" (p. 19) if we fail to awaken their appreciation of and desire to engage in literate activities. Despite the importance of the affective element, she found few studies on the effects of attitudes on reading, which "may be due, in part, to the fact that the development of instruments that measure attitudes has been neglected. Research on reading attitudes of elementary school age children is not extensive and is even more sparse with young children" (p. 21).

Later studies seemed to heed Saracho's (1984-1985) call for more complex quantitative

investigations of children's attitudes towards and purposes for reading. In an investigation of reading attitude development from childhood to adulthood, Smith (1990) reported findings that indicated "the importance of developing good reading attitudes among children" (p. 210). He called for more research "to determine effective ways to promote positive attitude development during the formative years of elementary school" (p. 219). Also troubled by a sense that the affective domain had been neglected, Shapiro and White (1991) looked at how reading attitudes differed as a function of reading instruction and grade level and at how perceptions of the reading process differed as a function of these same two factors. They stated, "It is clear that if attitudes toward reading are related to reading achievement, more information regarding what impacts the development of positive attitudes is needed" (p. 53). In their design the children were interviewed to elicit their perceptions of the reading process and instruction. Prior to asking each child the four research questions, the examiner engaged him or her in conversation for "a few minutes" (p. 55). This was done to "place the subject as ease" and to address that fact that "earlier research studies on children's perceptions of reading yielded a large number of 'I don't know' responses'" (p. 55) which may have been due to misunderstandings about the questions. These brief conversations, therefore, were intended to set the stage for the questions to follow.

Such a design, while undoubtedly advancing our knowledge base, highlighted the need for qualitative studies in this area as well, since ease may not develop after a few minutes of conversation with a stranger, and four questions might not get at the heart of a child's perceptions about reading. Shapiro and White (1991) closed by calling for the "affective domains of reading [to] become a focus of reading research and instruction" (p. 64). Recently, researchers have been writing more about the knowledge gained when we listen to readers share their thoughts about reading through conversational interviews and observations (Landis, 1999; Millard, 1994) and

when we read their insights from data collected through large scale content analyses and surveys (e.g., Greaney & Neuman, 1990; Schraw & Bruning, 1996). Classroom educators are being heard as they share stories about the children they teach. For example, Michel (1994) reported on her first graders' rich perceptions of reading, noting that they were socioculturally influenced—a belief that is shared by many in the field of critical literacy (e.g., Shannon, 1995; Street, 1993).

Other recent work investigating learners perspectives has highlighted the value and need to listen to children's voices—to their interpretations of their learning experiences and perspectives on their lives (Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993). Observing young children intercontextually over time, Dahl (1995) reported that "children connect what they experience in school with who they are….Children think about themselves, what they are trying to accomplish, what they know how to do, and what they think is important and care about" (p. 129). By tapping into these insights and building on them, we have a far better chance of creating meaningful learning environments that genuinely extend children's abilities. Interviewing adults' about their recollections of learning to read, Morawski and Brunhuber (1993) found that people's perception of the reading process and of themselves as readers "cannot help but influence their acquisition of reading" (p. 35). If this is the case, then

> [o]btaining an understanding of these perceptions and what led to their formation would greatly contribute to the prevention and intervention of reading difficulties. Individuals' earliest recollections of learning to read are a source which would provide critical information for reaching such an understanding. (p. 35)

Obtaining this "critical information" from children themselves might allow for even more timely prevention and intervention. When ninth-grade Tonya says, "There isn't time for reading in school anymore. Maybe we've just grown out of it" (Spencer, 1991, p. 65), it seems clear that we

need to take a look at children's perceptions of reading and aspirations for themselves as readers.

Method

Believing that qualitative research can provide unique insights into this issue, I designed the current study to address this gap in part. In this section I discuss the design, describe the sample selection, and explain the data collection and data analysis procedures I used to explore the research questions that guided my investigation into five first graders' perceptions of reading and of themselves as readers. I address the potential limitations of the design here as well.

Design

In this interpretive, inductive and generative field study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1990) I observed, interviewed, and interacted with five focal students in a first grade classroom. I was a participant observer (Wolcott, 1992), continually interacting with the children. Using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I created composites, similar to the case analyses in Patton (1990), which I then used to write descriptive narratives (e.g., Allen, Michalove & Shockley, 1993) about each of the five children that addressed my research questions. In creating these descriptions, I compared information for each child across the various methods of data collection described below, both while I was in the process of collecting it and after all data had been gathered. I also identified key concepts related to my basic questions that are summarized in the discussion section of this paper.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in May and June in a medium-sized elementary school (approximately 500 students) in a university town in the southeastern United States. The focal children were five first graders who were seven years old, with the majority of the class participating only briefly. I was involved with this class as a parent and a reading volunteer prior

to beginning this project, and the teacher invited me to continue working with her children as a researcher after hearing about my plans.

I used criterion selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1990) to get a sample from the students who returned their consent forms. I wanted to work with children who had experience reading with a variety of adults and in settings outside the classroom. I felt this would ease much of the potential discomfort of the research process. To ensure the children would have the experience needed to respond to my interview questions, I needed to work those who were already independent readers, which I defined as being able to read on their own in books of their own choosing. Initially, I decided to choose children who were not already being pulled out of the regular classroom for reading or other special services. It seemed that those children who were not receiving outside services might benefit from the small group setting and extra individual attention I could provide. Because the study was carried out during the last three weeks of school, schedules had changed and times were more flexible. This allowed me to add the further criterion that the group also represent a maximum variation sample (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) within the criterion of "independent reader."

In consultation with the teacher, I selected four independent readers who together made up a varied sample with regards to race, gender, and reading ability (see Table 1). Although I had not intended to include a struggling reader in the group, one child had not had the opportunity to participate in my previous small group work. He was included in this project because the teacher and I believed he could benefit from the activities.

[Insert Table 1]

Data Collection Procedures

In this section I will delineate the individual and small group activities I used to gather the

data for this research. Field notes on some whole group activities supplemented the data collection as did my previous personal experiences with these children.

Individual activities. I began by interviewing the five children individually in semi-formal interviews, using questions from the Burke Reading Inventory (Hubbard & Power, 1993) and from Allen et al. (1993) and including relevant probes and follow-up questions (Patton, 1990) (see Appendix A). I used some of the issues which came up to guide later group interviews (see Appendix B). In individual sessions, the five children selected books to read or have read to them, and we discussed the books to the extent each child wished. To each of these reading sessions I brought 3 stacks of books: 17 that I felt were read-to books because of their length and difficulty; 17 that I felt could possibly be read by the children, though some would be hard for some of them; and about 20 familiar "little books" (short, predictable texts with controlled vocabulary) from their classroom.

Small group activities. In small group sessions the five children read and discussed books, illustrated their views of themselves as readers, shared their pictorial depictions, and participated in group discussions of interview questions. I noted the titles the children chose to read, audiotaped all readings and discussions to be transcribed, took field notes during group readings, collected the drawings, and participated in their interactions as a facilitator and, at times, as a member of the discussion. My familiarity with the children helped with rapport and neutrality issues (Patton, 1990) in both individual and small group activities.

Whole group activities. I observed the focal five children and took field notes during two whole class reading sessions. In order to get a broader picture of my participants, I spoke with the 16 consenting students, asking them (one at a time in private) who they considered good readers in their class and who they preferred to read with if given the opportunity for some free reading

time with a partner. I also asked them if they had a specific reason for choosing those names.

Strengths and Limitations of the Design

In his research examining students perceptions of reading, Cairney (1988) wondered whether the subjects' verbal ability limited their potential responses or if the children were telling the researcher what they thought he wanted to hear. He also asked if the context affected the children's responses, and "if the children were asked to respond during reading, would their responses be different?" (p. 427). To address the issue of context bound responses, I collected data in a variety of formats and settings which provided multiple opportunities to observe and listen to the children. Some children were more verbal in the individual reading sessions and others in the interview or small group settings. Each was highly responsive in at least one setting.

Regardless, this study represents a subjective interpretation of the children's views. I do not claim to have captured the one true essence of these five children as readers. In agreement with Denzin (1989), I do not believe that "a life…is cut of whole cloth, and [that] its many pieces, with careful scrutiny, can be fitted into proper place (p. 20). When researchers write about a life, about a person, we cannot claim to be giving "the 'real' objective detail of a 'real' person's life" (p. 21). Instead we are taking whatever information we have been given, filtering it through our own socioculturally influenced lenses, and transferring our interpretations into a print medium that is also culturally prescribed. Though this in no way devalues what we do, it remains an important reminder to all researchers to maintain an honest humility about our work.

It must also be understood that my own history is connected to this research. I have been where these children are, and my memories are still very strong. As Anderson and Jack (1991) caution in their work with adult women, I must be aware that the

critical areas demanding attention are frequently those where I think I already know what

> the woman is saying. This means I am already appropriating what she says into an existing schema, and therefore I am no longer really listening to her. Rather, I am listening to how what she says fits into what I already know. (p. 19)

To guard against this, the constant comparative method is an ideal tool. By transcribing and typing field notes while I was still in the data collection process, I was able to watch how I interacted with the children and go back to pick up on aspects of their talk that I may have subconsciously incorporated into my schema while listening initially. Armed with this heightened awareness, I was better able to guard against my internal voice overpowering theirs.

A third point that needs to be clarified is the effect of the research process itself, the interaction between myself and the participants, on the data collected. As Rosenthal (1993) notes

> Each interview is a product of the mutual interaction between speaker and listener. Narrators do not simply reproduce prefabricated stories regardless of the interactional situation, but rather create their stories within the social process of mutual orientation according to their definition of the interview situation. The neopositivistic research tradition would regard this aspect as an irritation that must be eliminated, reduced or at least controlled. (p. 64)

Since all research methods, whether they be qualitative or quantitative, alter participants' behavior in some ways, I do not see any possibility of eliminating this perceived irritation. I feel as Rosenthal, that it "cannot be eliminated without eliminating the constructs themselves" (pp. 64-65). And since studying human behavior and human reactions is what we do, we must simply try as best we can to account for the impact of the research effect by carefully describing both our own positions and our respondents' words and actions.

This study's main strengths derive from its perceived weaknesses in that I am fully

committed to this research both personally and professionally, as a teacher, an investigator, a chronicler and a fellow reader. Making use of this subjective connection allows for "a depth of understanding often lacking in other approaches" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 44). Although the actual data collection period took only two weeks, I had a chance to get to know these children over the period of a year as I volunteered in their classroom, visited with them at lunch, and spoke with them in the halls of the school. In addition, qualitative research methods allowed me to hear the children's own voices, which reflect their experiences in ways that other research designs might muffle. The personal connection may have altered their behavior, but it also seemed to increase their willingness to share their compelling insights in what they perceived as a secure environment. Aware of the potential and perceived limitations discussed above, I was reflective throughout the data collection and analysis, continually reevaluating my role as a researcher and my abilities to listen to these children.

Data Analysis

As mentioned above I used constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze the data as I collected and transcribed it. In an attempt to address Anderson and Jack's (1991) concern about really hearing what the children were saying and a related concern of how best to capture the authenticity of the voices I heard, I taped all interviews and group discussions and transcribed the words carefully and completely as the children spoke them. I included inflection, intonation, fillers, and pauses in the children's speech and used direct transcriptions without correcting for written language conventions. Even so, much of the immediacy is lost in that the transcription is indeed a translation (Denzin, 1997, Riessman, 1993) and "a new, unrepeatable event in the life of a text" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.106).

Creating the case analyses. Reading over the transcripts multiple times, I began to

familiarize myself with the voices of the children. Then, looking at all of the material relating to each child individually, I read for any clues to understanding their perceptions of reading and of themselves as readers. I made a tentative list of descriptors and highlighted the corresponding sections of data which I then reorganized into separate data files, one for each child, on my computer. As I read through the data, I made a second list of notes and description which I compared with the first (Merriam, 1998). Through this process, I generated a separate composite or case analysis (Patton, 1980/1990) for each child that I felt represented her/him as accurately as was possible. Returning to the transcripts, I then wrote increasingly detailed descriptions.

Creating the categories. After finishing the descriptions, I went back to both the original data set and the case analyses, looking at how the children were similar or dissimilar in their views of themselves in the context of reading. I listed descriptors for each child separately, later comparing the lists and clarifying previous descriptors in light of new insights I was developing. Initially not consulting outside theories, I kept close to the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967), who commented that "merely selecting data for a category that has been established by another theory tends to hinder generation of new categories" (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 183). Although Patton (1980/1990) stated, "Simplifying the complexity of reality into some manageable classification scheme is the first step of analysis" (p. 382), I found it very difficult to reduce these children's thoughts to mutually exclusive categories. Therefore, I will first present the children in the form of narratives before presenting a discussion of the categories. The reader may chose which way best tells the story of these children as readers. Perhaps the combination of the two methods offers new insights.

Description of the Readers

Maybe if we can understand why some readers read, what motivates them, what their

purposes are, and how they define themselves and the reading process, we can find ways to reach those students who do not see themselves as readers, those who equate reading with school-defined reading and grade levels, and those who simply state: "I do not like to read." Both students and teachers are stakeholders in their own and each other's learning (Lincoln, 1995). Though "[a]dults often underestimate the ability of children to be shrewd observers [and] to possess insight and wisdom about what they see and hear" (p. 89), Lincoln believed that when adults recognize children's incredible internal resources and begin to learn *with* children, the two groups can "combine power and create new forms of wisdom" (p. 89). The more readers we come to know, even if vicariously through others' research, the richer our understanding of both children's views of learning and of the reading process will become.

With this hope, I introduce here five exceptional readers, exceptional if for no other reason than their delightful individuality and their compelling insights into a complex and exciting process. Though I have tried to capture much of these children's voices in this paper, I hear Denzin's (1989) caution loudly in my head: "There is no way to stuff a real-live person between the two covers of a book" (p. 83). I am presenting but one, static version of children who are continually growing and changing, but this freezing of their views allows me to preserve one piece and to get to know that part in a depth that fluid living transactions make difficult.

LaKendra : "I'm proud. I get proud when I read."

LaKendra the helpful, the practical, the proud is a cheerful, expressive child. Her definition of a good reader was one who "knows lots of words" and that fit her well. Her excitement about reading and knowing words was impossible to miss. She was constantly whispering, cueing, and pointing to the books of others while they were reading, helping them along whether they needed it or not. She remembered her initial experience with reading:

> Um, well my mama started reading to me and then I started learning how to read . . . I wanted to read when I was little, when I was five, and I couldn't, so I asked my mom to teach me . . . And then she taught me. That's how I learned to read.

LaKendra's purposes for reading were varied. She wanted to "write a book" about animals and believed reading was the way to begin. She had a don't-put-off-until-tomorrow attitude when it came to reading: "Um, So I won't have to learn when I get older. So I can know how to read when I get older." She voiced this sentiment repeatedly in both individual and group sessions. She said that she sometimes read when she was "bored" or when she needed to pass some time in school: "Well, until the teacher comes to another thing. Then I read a book, I start reading a book, or draw a picture . . . Um, when the, um, other kids [are] not finished with their work."

Reading was important to LaKendra, and being a good reader meant practice: "First they need to practice . . . 'Cause I think they will know when they get older, they will know how to read. That's why they should practice." Practice meant reading books. Reading books meant knowing lots of words. That was what distinguished adult reading material from children's: "It's more, they have, they have more words in them . . . And they, um, the grownups know all the words . . . And all the grownups, almost all the grownups, know the words . . . So that's why we have to read little books." On the other hand, kids read because it was fun, something LaKendra never mentioned in connection with adults' reading. "The pictures, the pictures and the words" made it fun for her.

While adults read for instrumental reasons, reading the "newspaper" for information and "prescriptions" when sick, LaKendra read for "fun," saying "I just like to read!" She liked "books with, um, special endings . . . sweet endings" like the Lion and the Gypsy (Patterson, 1990) which she enjoyed because "it was good. It was sweet. It was great." She read to feel "special"

herself and for the vicarious experiences books offer. She became fully involved in The Cat in the Hat (Seuss, 1957/1985), identifying with the children and laughing excitedly at the antics of the characters Thing One and Thing Two. When asked what she would tell her mother about the day if it had happened to her, LaKendra responded, "I'd say nothing. Well, if my mother asked me, I'd say, 'Nothing.' She said, she said, 'You, I know you did something.' She would know, 'cause she would know I was, uh, 'cause I was kind of scared [laughs]!" Often while reading this book, she mentioned the mother coming in: "It would be funny if the mother came and caught them;" "I know their mom is gonna' get them now!" and "The children wanted him to go so their mom wouldn't get them." While making it clear there would be no fooling *her* mother, LaKendra was absorbed in the fun this book provided.

Reading was also social. LaKendra loved choral reading and suggested it repeatedly during our small group time. She shared books with a child who lived next-door, remarking, "Sometimes we read the same book." She also liked to read with other people: "I show them the pictures and read them the book." The laughter and camaraderie in the small group reading suited LaKendra well. She engaged in the joking and discussions, often leading the way. However, being read to was also still important for her: "I like to read it myself and I like for other people to read to me."

LaKendra's reading identity was complex. She appreciated humor and the predictability of books she had read before and liked to be read to as well as to read books on her own and with friends. She often made predictions and personal connections while reading or being read to, carrying on extended conversations about the text. During The Cat in the Hat (Seuss, 1957/1985) she interrupted herself to comment on each scene as she read. For example, when the cat was about to drop all of the items he was juggling, LaKendra abruptly stopped reading and said,

> Oh, the cat's about to fall. I would catch the cake, 'cause the glass might break. I sure wouldn't catch the rake, no, 'cause it might poke you. I'd catch the fish, kind of. I'd set [the cake] down somewhere and catch the fish. Then the mom might come in and get them.

Reading was part performance, bringing out many emotions in LaKendra, including fear, comfort, and pride: "I feel good . . . um, special," she exclaimed about reading, but also "kind of scared . . . 'Cause they [other students] might laugh at me." She continued, "I'm a good reader!", but adds, "I'm shy when I read out loud." After reading a particularly long book, she beamed, "I believe I'll know how to read when I get older!" Her pride was also evident when she triumphed over a difficult word, using her variety of strategies to figure it out. I was greeted with a sparkling smile whenever this happened that was so warm I found myself waiting for the next stumble with anticipation.

During our individual sessions LaKendra chose her books carefully and relished the private time (see Appendix C for a sample of our interactions). She enjoyed knowing what was coming, sharing the information with me at times while smiling, as if we were collaborators in crime and were revealing secrets that we were not meant to reveal. She reveled in that pretense. She scouted the pile, looking for something which would catch her fancy, reading titles and making connections to past literary experiences as she searched. On spying The Lion and the Gypsy (Patterson, 1990), she exclaimed, "Now this looks good. I want to read that story." I had her read the title, and we talked about it for awhile. LaKendra set the scene by commenting on first illustration: "It looks like they're at, kind of at Hawaii because look at the tree with the coconuts . . . It looks kind of quiet there." Then, as she requested, I began to read. Having never been to the ocean in real life, LaKendra settled in for the imaginary experience. When we

finished and I mentioned we needed to be getting back to the classroom, she was disappointed: "It feels like we've been in for about 20 minutes and that's not how long we've been in here." We had been reading and talking for over an hour.

Nathan: "It makes me smart!"

Quiet and watchful, Nathan said very little during our interview, surprised me with his verbosity and eye for detail during individual reading time, and found a position in the middle ground for our small group activities. "To be smart" was the main purpose he saw for reading for both children and adults, and he focused on learning "new words." Like LaKendra, he credited his mother with teaching him to read: "My mama taught me . . . And then I started reading 'em by myself . . . She taught me the words that's in books . . . when I was five years old." Labeling himself a "good" reader, Nathan believed that by connecting reading and writing he could improve. "How? I asked. "You read the thing, then you write it." was his matter-of-fact response.

Using context when reading, he initially skipped words he did not know and went on, explaining, "Then I might know it." His sister, a "good reader," did the same thing. This slowed his reading, but he kept a steady pace. He had trouble when the group engaged in choral reading, however. As he slipped further behind, he began making distracting, but relatively quiet noises with his mouth as he followed the text being read with his eyes.

The comfort of knowing what was going to happen, whether when reading or being read to, was important to Nathan's view of reading. During an individual reading session, he chose to hear The Runaway Bunny (Brown, 1942/1977), a book he knew well and loved. His other choices were all books he had read many times. "I like to read books over and over," he admitted with a shy smile. Sometimes he informed me of what was going to happen. "She gonna' be the wind,' he predicted in The Runaway Bunny. "He's gonna' stab that fish," he warned in Go, Dog.

Go! (Eastman, 1961/1989). Sometimes his excitement got the better of him, and he would blurt out a "secret" that I was not meant to hear. At other times he stopped himself just in time: "But he, he really wanted a puppy, but he ain't gonna' get no puppy. I know what he's gonna get. [Nathan looked at me.] I'm not telling you!" His knowledge created a position of power from which he dispersed suspense.

In addition to suspense, inherent or manufactured, being a reader offered Nathan a chance to display knowledge and express humor. He picked The Runaway Bunny (Brown, 1942/1977) because "it's funny," and he laughed at the illustrations. He read the passages in Go, Dog. Go! (Eastman, 1961/1989) about the dog's extravagant hat with expressive intonation and humor. He saw humor in the words used to describe the dogs' houseboat: "I like that part . . . It's funny . . . Because of how they say it." Nathan asked about others' knowledge and demonstrated his own numerous times while listening to Franklin Wants a Pet (Bourgeois & Clark, 1995): "How they know that turtles have four fingers?" and "I thought frogs ate flies. They eat some, a whole bunch of things that fly." His comments were spontaneous additions to the text, often provided for my understanding: "That mean yes [referring to Franklin's nodding of his head]. Did you know that a turtle can get out of its shell? And leave it right there. And look like a lizard. And then they go more faster. That shell slow it down." He also commented, "Purr. Did you know the biggest cat is the cheetah, that is that still can purr? It's not the big, biggest cat, but it's the biggest cat of them cats and it can purr . . .They run fast." He had learned this on TV.

Reading was a social event, a time for sharing personal experiences. Nathan shared other connections he made to television. One drawing from The Runaway Bunny (Brown, 1942/1977) prompted him to remark: "She is a tree. I believe she's just cut like that...I saw this movie. Some people cut these leaves shaped like animals and then this man thought the animals came alive. I

saw it in a movie." He frequently interrupted the reading to make comments on the pictures, text, story line, mood of the characters, or anything else that struck him as interesting or relevant. He made predictions of future events and gave his opinions. Moving to much more personal ground, he explained one reason he liked to read Go, Dog. Go! (Eastman, 1961/1989) so much: "When my dog Old Sparkle died, I read this book." That was a long time ago, he said, but he still had a sad look when he talked about it. Later when he chose Franklin Wants a Pet (Bourgeois & Clark, 1995), he continued his poignant story after I asked him if he had other pets (see Appendix D.)

Part of being a reader for Nathan was watching the pictures and the words. He noticed details and discrepancies others might miss or disregard. He saw the inequity of the dogs' hats in Go, Dog. Go! (Eastman, 1961/1989). "He only got a paper hat and she got a bowl." He commented on the alternating color and black and white pictures in The Runaway Bunny (Brown, 1942/1977) and noticed details of the rabbits' house I had never consciously seen. Nathan was particularly bothered by the disappearance of two dogs from one page to the next in the sleeping scene in Go, Dog. Go! (Eastman, 1961/1989). He kept flipping the pages back and forth: "I thought there was a girl dog. It was right there. I saw a girl dog, but where's she at now . . . It two girl dogs . . . Oh, yeah, I don't see them here either. They probably got up first." Making such inferences to account for the details he noticed was a common part of reading for Nathan. A careful reader, he watched the words the author chose with precision. He read "Work, dogs. Work!" and said, "That's a new name for this book" (referring to Go, Dog. Go!; Eastman, 1961/1989). On another page he said, " 'Go down.' It could've been 'get down.'" He wondered why the author repeated the phrase "To the tree! To the tree!" and mentioned, "That right there sound good: 'Up the tree! Up the tree!'" He wanted to know what kind of word "Noooooo!" was and what "B-20" stood for on the book's spine.

In our small group session, Nathan described the first book he ever read: "I had read a dinosaur book. It, it was made out of, out of a pillow and a cover. The pillow and cover was soft . . . And when you turned the page it gets more soft." This seems so fitting for Nathan, soft and quiet, but full of excitement. When we were about done, he said, "I want you to read me another short book." He chose a little book we had read together months previously about finding not-so-hidden hidden pictures of animals. It was so short I suggested we read another one. Deciding for the first time on one he did not know, he picked another very easy repetitive book. As I made motions to pack up, I heard: "One more . . . One I like." How could I refuse? He was tired then. "Does reading wear you out?" I asked him. "Sometimes," he responded.

Frank: "It feels like you're getting higher every second."

Frank entered the room quietly and wanted to start by making a stack with the books. He picked up Patrick's Dinosaurs (Carrick, 1983), telling me: "My mom's rented it, too." He could not recall the name of the book, but when I read the first part he finished the title. As I began, he looked at the pictures so intently I hated to turn the pages, so I said, "I'll let you turn the pages. Then I'll know you're done looking." He turned them once and then said, "I'm done whenever you get through reading." Later in the group interview he mentioned one of his favorite reading memories: "One of my [favorite] TV shows that I watch some days it has some reading books in it that we can read . . . That has pictures like books, but it turns the pages for you."

An open and friendly child, Frank was as pleased to be included in the study as I was to have him. When asked what he liked about reading, he answered without hesitation: "The pictures!" When asked what he would miss the most if he could not read, again he quickly responded, "The pictures!" Despite this, he, like his classmates, equated reading with "knowing the words" and being able to "put together big letters." He had learned to read in kindergarten:

"First I wanted to know the word. Then I'll do the, put it together and then I knew what the word was . . . And I began to read. And I was in kindergarten." The main purpose he saw for reading for kids, including himself, was to "learn more stuff." Despite this statement, he had "no idea" why grown-ups read and did not seem to think reading would fit into his future career plans: "I'm gonna do what my aunt does . . . Works at night and day . . . and gets paid more." He characterized the reading material he used in class as "hard stuff," saying he got help from his neighbor: "He tells me the word. Like when I read over it and say it."

When Frank read to me, it was very slowly, deliberately, and with numerous miscues. Sometimes it seemed as if he were a precious record stuck in its groove, waiting for a nudge to get him back on his way. He skipped words, got help from me, and ran sentences together through periods and exclamation points, but he kept on, seemingly undaunted. To see if the miscues were affecting his understanding, I asked him what was going on in the story. Frank was not only clear on the gist of the text, but had some suggestions for the main character of Moongame (Asch, 1984): "He's trying to hide from the moon. I know a better place to hide from the moon—inside with your windows shut and your curtains down." At first he said he had not "checked that one out" before, but later said he had read the book, "but it was a long time, so it tricked me." Though he was not bothered by asking for help, he also had no problem with just skipping a word that was too difficult to figure out.

Frank was aware of his limitations, and this affected his image of himself as a reader: "I'm not that good, but I'm good." "Can you tell me more about it?" I asked. "Just not good," he responded. Then he added, "Well, I'm not into the real hard stuff yet. I'm doing the real, kind of hard." Although I questioned whether I should probe more deeply, I plunged in: "But you said you're a good reader. Why'd you say that?" He was not at all put out: "'Cause the kind-of-hard

stuff are easy." He had divided reading into "kind of hard stuff," material he had already covered and could do relatively easily; "hard stuff," that which he was currently learning, and "real hard stuff," material at a level he had not yet attained. "When I asked him how it felt to have read the whole Moongame (Asch, 1984) book, he responded, "Happy, but I didn't read it by myself." Despite this, he believed it was all right to get help "with the really, really hard words like them. Some of them I didn't even know." A careful and deliberate child, Frank took time to reflect on both the task at hand and his feelings about it. He mentioned that no one read to him very often. And though he said at one point that he read a lot, he later noted softly in our group discussion, "I haven't got that much practice. 'Cause I didn't have much practice at school." He also said it felt "great" to read, later changing that to "good" and adding, "Good, but I don't get to read all that much." Naming his mother and father as "good readers" because "they, like, learned how to read before me," Frank still expected them to have problems with some words as well.

As with LaKendra and Nathan, comfort was an important aspect of reading for Frank. Twice he mentioned it in connection with being read to: "My mom read[s] to me at night. I like to be in my bed or down in my aunt's bed." He liked to read in his room and thought it was "better when you're reading to yourself" as opposed to reading out loud to a group. He was uncomfortable reading individually in our small group setting at first, though he went along, stopping at times to examine the pictures instead of the text. After some time, however, he relaxed and even showed uncharacteristic persistence at one point when he was cut off while reading by the other students. Though they had all gone on to the next page before he had finished reading, Frank was determined and was successful in getting them all to turn back as he completed his sentence.

Like with Nathan, reading with someone was a time to display knowledge Frank might

not otherwise have had a chance to share. When we were talking about the dinosaur diplodocus using its nose to get air get when under water, he commented, "Like the looking thing...Like the looking thing on a submarine." He knew that triceratops "can even beat up a tyrannosaurus [with] their horns" and added, "I call them 'three-horns 'cause they have another name, but I can't even think of it." He also mentioned their horns "look like daggers, but not with the pointing out things on the side." When I read about tyrannosaurus (p. 28) Frank commented, "Patrick didn't think this dinosaur ate leaves . . . He doesn't. He eats meat."

Being a reader was a source of humor for Frank. He laughed at the "walnut-brained stegosauruses" in Patrick's Dinosaurs (Carrick, 1983, p. 18) and the "triceratops waiting for the traffic light" (p. 20). When I read, "The dinosaurs have been gone for 60 million years" (p. 31), Frank added with a smile, "But not today!" He was very detailed in his sense of humor, smiling as he described Bear's fruitless search for the moon in Moongame (Asch, 1984):

> He looked in the tree, he looked behind the house; he looked in the garbage can, and he looked on the roof. Why would it be in a tree? And why would it be in a lake or a river? And why would it be in a cave? They don't know where the moon is. It's in the sky.

Frank paid attention to the specifics of both text and illustration, adding personal comments to the reading as well. In The Rainbow Fish, (Pfister, 1992) he carefully scrutinized the illustrations and said: "I think he's going to give him that one [the smallest shiny scale]...'cause he said one little one." When I read the stegosauruses "plodded along" (Carrick, 1983, p. 18), he remarked he thought it was "walked along." When I explained "plodded," he responded, "My dog does that." He interrupted me mid-sentence when we got to the stegosaurus page to tell me that he liked them, adding later that "tyrannosaurus rex is my favorite dinosaur." He did not have many books about dinosaurs at home.

He described the books his mother had bought him at the book fair as well as those he did not yet have. He browsed through my book stacks, looking for interesting books or ones he recognized. When he found I Can Read With My Eyes Shut (Seuss, 1978), he declared, "I can do that if it's a easy book" and proceeded to recite a book by heart: "Come see the circus. People that swing. Horses that prance. And dogs that dance." Although he described it as an "easy book [that] don't have that much pages," the reader Frank was obviously proud. And so was I.

Paul: "It's pretty boring just listening to books. I like reading them!"

For exuberant Paul, being a reader meant knowing how to spell and mastering vowels, sounds, letter combinations, and writing. Readers needed to "just try to spell it out" when they got stuck, though this did not happen very often for "good readers" in Paul's opinion. Sounding like a spokesperson for a traditional skills-oriented view, as described by Hiebert and Fisher (1991), he remembered his learning process this way:

> First you got to learn about vowels and sounds, how they go in order. And you have to learn how to spell and write. Then you can read. In pre-K I learned how to put them in order. In kindergarten I learned how to spell, and then I could read.

Paul put many of these strategies to use. His advice for other readers who got stuck followed along the same vein: "I would ask them if they know how to put the letters in order, the sounds. They know how to do all that."

His purpose for continuing learning to read was clear: "Chapter books. I'd like to read a long book, chapter book like Goosebumps . . . I like Goosebumps." He believed he had to "learn all the words and then start on the story." When he discovered that one of the books he picked to read with me was a "chapter book" (Henry and Mudge and the Bedtime Thumps; Rylant, 1991), he was first surprised: "Whoa, this is a chapter book!" Then he reacted in an intriguing way,

stopping every page or so to declare: "After this page we'll be finished" or "Let's do a couple of more pages." He alternated such statements at intervals while continuing to read all but the last chapter. The next day when we started back, he was not even seated before asking, "Is the Mudge book in there? . . . Let's read that." He proceeded to read the last chapter, liking to finish books, even if, or because they are, very long.

For Paul reading was powerful autonomy. Since he had learned how to read, he no longer wanted to be read to. "My mom used to (read me Goosebumps), but I want to read them now." He still wanted to share books, however, only now on his own terms: "If I were to read a book at home, I'd tell my mom I wanted to read a book to her, like I read three chapter books to her. And I only got stuck on about five words. And that's all." His idea of sharing a book with the class was to "ask my teacher if I can go in front of everyone and read it." Reading felt "Good. Very, very good," but being read to was a whole other matter. It felt "bad. 'Cause I like to read." Paul continued, "Um, I like to read. When I was a kid, I didn't like to read. I liked someone to read to me. Now I like to read to someone, and not someone like to read to me." Paul was the only child of the five to voice this sentiment, but the control and autonomy reading independently gave him was related to the control Nathan found when being read to from a familiar book by someone he presumed to be unfamiliar with it. Nathan enjoyed the power of choosing whether or not to reveal the outcome only he knew, while Paul enjoyed revealing that outcome for himself. Even when Paul chose a book that was exceptionally difficult for him (Little Polar Bear, de Beer, 1987) he neither wanted help nor stopped to question the inconsistencies that resulted from his problems with the vocabulary. Decoding independently seemed to be the most important aspect of reading for Paul; more important than the meaning.

Paul's purposes for reading included knowing the words on his computer games, although

he admitted there were not many: "When I think about the Mario Cart and all the Nintendo 64 games, then you can read stuff on it. But not much words." He later added: "I like to read things on Nintendo games. They have all these words that tells you about the game. I like to read those. And, um, on Mario Cart I can read every single thing." He went on to describe the games in such detail, with actions and sound effects, that I could feel his excitement. When he was done, he stated simply, "Except it could ruin your mind. I don't play it often." An adult had told him this, though he could not remember who. I asked him if he thought books could ruin your mind. The quick reply was sadly intriguing: "They don't do anything to your mind. They just help you read. The games might get so interesting you might play them for the rest of your life."

Although Paul equated learning to read with a seemingly tedious letter-to-sound-to-spelling process, he felt that he and other kids read because "they like to," "because it's fun," and "probably just for the reading." He saw this sense of pleasure diminishing as readers got older: " 'Cause in 5th grade you have to read all these big books...When you have, like, the history test, you have to read about history." This exclusively efferent (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) approach to reading was already affecting him:

> Like, um, our weekly readers. You have to understand or you might miss some of [the content questions]. You have to read every word or you might get the answers wrong, uh, get it wrong, 'cause we have, like, all these answers on the back that we have to do. And if we get the word wrong and we think it's right, then we get the answer wrong.

Adults, he believed, read mainly for such instrumental reasons:

> So, maybe there's some words they might forget to spell. . . . Um, sometimes they might have to spell 'Empire State Building' or something and they might not know how to spell it, so it might be in the dictionary and they can look it up and read about it.

His understanding about what grownups read included only things they read to kids and things they needed for their jobs. For example, he had his mother read him Goosebumps books as he could not read this series independently yet. Otherwise, he had only seen his parents read "a book about work." His views on reading as it applied to teachers were as clear as they were traditional. If you could not read, you "couldn't be a teacher" or teach "history" or "grade papers . . . or tell [students] what to do, like tell them how to write the sheets and if she couldn't read the teacher book, then she wouldn't know what to do."

Paul was both in charge of the reading and willing to take calculated risks. Usually these risks took the form of him choosing an unfamiliar book from a very familiar series. First he chose Henry and Mudge and the Bedtime Thumps (Rylant, 1991), a new book, but one whose characters he knew well. He easily made intertextual connections to other books in the series. For example, after reading that the dog Mudge had eaten a moth, Paul recounted another of Mudge's escapades: "Once he ate a flower. Mudge ate a flower . . . And, um, Henry wanted to pick it and then he told . . . Mudge to pick it, and he ate it." Paul later found the Bear books by Frank Asch. He skipped over Moongame (Asch, 1984), having read it previously, picked Bear Shadow (Asch, 1985), and said, "It's, ooh, the shadow one. I never read this one . . . I have another one of these. I have two books of these, but I don't have this one, and I never even heard of it." He liked books with the same characters, including the Waldo and I Spy series that he talked about at length.

This talkative, charismatic boy considered himself a "pretty good" reader: "I probably miss one word in each [book] when I read. Um, sometimes I might know it and I forget how, I forget what word it is. And I think awhile and then it snaps into my brain." His closing comment about reading was that "It makes you smart. That's all." Being an independent reader had clearly transformed Paul's idea of who he was and his sense of control over his world. He was a reader,

not one who was read to, and he could direct his own learning.

Alyssa: "I get better at reading every day!"

A good reader "knows lots of the words" and can "read big words." Considering herself a good reader, Alyssa enjoyed "learning words and getting better at reading" and said reading "just very fun." She has learned to read at age five, a product of a contextually-based approach:

> I had a book and it was The Foot Book, and then I saw a word, and then I said it, and then I said, 'Mama, is this word right?' and then she said: 'Yeah.' And [pause], and then I could read all these other Dr. Seuss books. Then I could read two Arthur books. And now I can read, lots of books.

Initially, learning to read was an exciting revelation for Alyssa, but she saw reading as a life-long process of learning lots of words. Her goal was to "read harder books than I'm doing in school, that don't have words like cat and that stuff," and she had a plan on how to accomplish this:

> If it's a Dr. Seuss book, I would think of words that rhyme with the other word that I just said, and then I would say *that* word. Well, words that start with that letter. And if its another kind of book, I would [pause] I would try real, real, real, real hard, and that's it.

Unlike Paul, who saw reading as fun for children, Alyssa expected to love reading throughout her life. Her fluency and approach were indicators that this was very likely to be the case.

Although she preferred to read in "quiet" places, she was a social reader as well, liking to talk about books with friends: "I've got a friend named Brittany. It's . . . my next door neighbor, and I told her that I had a book, and it was a book that had little things you lick and they stick on." She went on to describe the book in excited tones. She listened intently when read to, making comments and asking questions, and clearly loved to read out loud to an adult. She referred to the text and the illustrations and added personal comments and bits of knowledge she

had acquired. She almost shivered when a passage in Moon Lake (Gantschev, 1981/1996) mentioned a well full of snakes: "I don't like amphibians. They feel weird." While perhaps not perfectly clear on the differences between reptiles and amphibians, Alyssa's transactions with books were full of feeling.

Reading had an informational purpose for Alyssa as well. Adults read "to tell them what happened in another state and that stuff. To tell them things." She added,

> To be very, very, very, very smart and know lots of big, big, big words. You will get lots of . . . well if they're a student, like teenager, they would get very, very good grades if they, um, had, they were doing reading and, and they had a spelling test and you had to read that kind of word, that word so you had to spell it.

Children read because "it's fun" and "so they can learn to read like grown-ups. Then when they're grown-up, they'll have learned how to read real well." She added simply, "if you're in, well, when you graduate you'll have to you'll have to read stuff." As did Paul, Alyssa realized the power and control that being a reader offered.

> You read cause you want to be a good reader when you're a grown-up, and if you have a word and you have to read it, if you have a, if you work at someplace and you have to read a lot of things, like you're a teacher and you didn't know how to read, then you wouldn't . . . you couldn't be a teacher or, or grade any...papers, or do stuff like that.

Despite this narrow view of adults', especially teachers', literacy needs and practices, reading was very pleasurable for Alyssa, and she had the environment to enjoy it: "I like to read in my room." Her books filled two shelves, and a favorite painting from The Runaway Bunny (Brown, 1942/1977) was hung on her wall. She readily shared books she had read and liked, referring to illustrators she enjoyed by name. She loved Dr. Seuss books for both the sounds and the pictures.

Alyssa read very fluently and with correct intonation. She was sensitive to the sounds of the text and to the sounds of language in general, not unusual since she was bilingual. Despite this, she commented, "When I read myself, I can't understand what I am reading . . . In chapter books. I don't know what I am talking about." Though she was not clear as to why this was, she did not have this problem when read to by an adult and thought maybe "'cause it's not me reading and when somebody else reads, I understand it much better. And my mom's bigger than me and she knows more of the words." Unlike Paul, the dual identity of being a reader and a person who was read to. Being read to did not diminish Alyssa's sense of control over reading.

A confident risk taker, Alyssa was interested in reading unfamiliar books as well as old favorites. She loved browsing through books and discussing the various titles. She approached humorous books playfully and liked to read "'cause sometimes books are funny." When reading I Can Read with my Eyes Shut (Seuss, 1978), she tried with her eyes shut, matched her tempo to the meaning of the text, turned the book in all different directions, played with the rhyming words, and made jokes and exaggerated intonational transitions between pages to heighten the impact of the words. She enjoyed books because "some, well, all of them teach you how to read and some teach you a lesson and that's good." She also had memories of books providing comfort. Fond of her own blanket, for example, she remembered her parents reading her a story before first grade about a boy who "wants to take his blanket, but he can't, and I've got a blanket. And when he's going to bed he's like, tomorrow's the, the first day of school so he stuffs his blanket in his pajama pants." When asked how it felt to read, the Dr. Seuss impact was obvious: "Great and good! Terrific! Stupendous! Any one of those."

Discussion of Overall Findings

In Literacy at the Crossroads, Routman (1996) discussed the "positive connection"

between extensive reading and discussion of books on one hand and children's reading comprehension on the other. She said that "children who are provided with time and opportunity to share their thoughts about reading tend to read more" (p. 85) and that in small groups, which provide time and space for all voices to be heard, children can learn to value others' insights through discussion. Perhaps they can learn to give more credence to their own as well. The five children in my study shared their thoughts on books and the reading process while also branching out into areas I had not anticipated, including a spontaneous discussion of Braille (see Appendix E). Though their reading levels and interests varied, these five readers worked together, helped one another, and listened to their peers. The one-on-one reading time also seemed to heighten their interest in reading and sharing books. They were both excited about reading while there and loathe to go when the time was up.

What was the purpose of reading for these five first graders? How did they see themselves as readers? Using the data from the individual reading and interviews, the group sessions, the children's illustrations, I identified a variety of identities and purposes. In many cases these seem to be so intertwined that to separate them would create a false representation. The children's views of reading and of their reading identity had developed together alongside their growing awareness of print. They read to "be smart" (Nathan), a purpose for reading, and saw themselves as "smart" because they were readers (Paul), a perception of self. The children saw a purpose for reading in that is was "fun", but book sharing was a time when personal humor could be expressed, allowing for a perception of self as humorous to be developed through reading. The children read to improve their reading (Alyssa, Paul, Frank, LaKendra). Some believed the purpose of reading was to learn more and get better grades (Paul, Alyssa) or simply to be able to read when they were older (LaKendra, Frank, Paul, Alyssa). LaKendra and Frank

mentioned their enjoyment at the pictures that went along with reading. Reading for one's job and for information came up (Alyssa, Paul, LaKendra) as did the joy of social contact in particular reading situations (LaKendra, Frank, Alyssa, Nathan). Pride was a motivating factor for all of the children as was the opportunity to share their knowledge. Consistency, security, and comfort were more important for some (LaKendra, Nathan, Frank), while others (Nathan, Paul, Alyssa) found a source of power in their control over the words on the page. Reading offered a playful outlet for language (Alyssa, Nathan), a chance for humor to be expressed and enjoyed (LaKendra, Nathan, Alyssa, Frank), and an escape from boredom (LaKendra).

The children made connections between their home environments and practices and their view of reading and of themselves as readers. Frank mentioned his lack of access to certain books, while the other children had access to more books and reading materials. Alyssa talked about liking to read in her quiet room, which she showed us in her illustration was well-supplied with books. LaKendra preferred to read where it was quiet, but mentioned not being able to read in her room because of her sister's loud rock music. The children differed in their access to technology, in what they saw adults reading, in their awareness of what literacy meant to others in their families, and in the amount of help they got or at least believed they were getting with their reading. They had varied notions about what kind of readers they were, from "great" (Alyssa) to "not so good, but good" (Frank), and what it might take to become a better reader: practicing, reading "thick books," reading their reading book, using their brains, reading lots of chapter books, knowing how to combine letters and sounds, or just "keeping on reading books."

Much of what these children said connected to previous research findings. Like many students in Mellon's (1992) study, all five children believed that "reading helps me to get smart" (p. 39) and to "get good grades" (p. 40). Like subjects in Cairney's (1988) research these

children, with the exception of Alyssa for the most part, focused on "decoding, vocabulary, and accuracy of reading" (p. 423) as measures of reading ability as opposed to meaning. Frank fit Cairney's description of a child who "indicated that success is seen to be related to the amount of reading they did" (p. 423). Paul indicated his teacher used what Cairney called "nonreading criteria to judge success" (p. 424) when he described the weekly reader exercise. Paul was also like readers who saw products as "more important than the process" and "being the best" as the goal" (Padak, et al., 1993, p. 365). Spencer (1991) addressed the social aspect of reading that these children felt as well: "When I finish a good book, the first thing I want to do is to share that book, encourage someone else to read it. My students do the same thing, given the opportunity" (p. 66). All five seemed to enjoy the reading times we had and the chance to talk about books.

After analyzing 1,216 essays written by 10-13 year olds from 15 countries, Greaney and Neuman (1990) came up initially with ten categories that described the functions reading served for the students they researched: general learning, enjoyment, escape, stimulation, relief from boredom, goals, morality, self-respect, convenience/flexibility, and utility (p. 176). In a second study they created a 49-item, four-option Likert scale from the statements produced in the original study. These findings resulted in the aforementioned ten categories being condensed into three main descriptors: utility, escape and enjoyment. In sifting through my participants' insights, I organized them into five broad categories (see Table 2).

[Insert Table 2]

Practice

A main purpose of reading was to practice reading. The children practiced mainly to read longer words and books, to learn more words, and to develop decoding skills. They had a variety of methods to determine word meaning, including using beginning or ending sounds, sounding

whole words out, asking friends and teachers, using rhyme and context, "try[ing] real hard," skipping or repeating words, or relying on illustrations. The children dwelled more on reading as decoding rather than as the making of meaning. The best way to read, they felt, was to "read it again (Nathan), "read it over and over" (Alyssa), and "keep on reading" (Paul). Frank felt children need to practice reading, something he felt he did not get enough chance to do in school or at home, so that they would be "able to put together big letters," long strings of letters, to make words they could read. Alyssa pushed herself in practice to "read harder books than I'm doing in school, that don't have words like cat and that stuff." They all felt the need to read faster, Paul particularly, and occasionally they others were impatient with the speed of Frank's oral reading. All five felt the need to know more and "bigger" words. The main difference noted between children's books and adults' books focused not on the ideas in the text, but on the length of the book and the number and length of words it contained. To read like grown-ups, these children figured, they needed more words.

People

All of the children mentioned reading as a social process, either when learning to read or as readers who liked to share texts with others in a variety of ways. In addition, they revealed the social nature of their actions with me individually and in our group. Rather than the meeting of physical needs being the reason for rapid language development, Britton (1970/1993) saw social enjoyment as the main motivator. This enjoyment came from the social aspect of speech and later from pleasure in the process of language. This can apply just as easily to written language and to reading. Vygotsky (1934/1986) understood social speech as the core from which both communicative speech and thought developed. Bakhtin (1986) emphasized the connectedness of our utterances to all that has gone before. All language is dialogic communication; speech and

thought are always dialogical, even within an individual. In this line of reasoning, a reading event is always social, even if we are sitting alone with a book (Bloome & Katz, 1997; Street, 1993).

LaKendra and Alyssa talked about sharing books with friends. All of the children enjoyed the opportunity to read either with or to another person. Even Paul, whose reading identity consisted of him being only a reader and not a person who was read to, liked reading books to his mother: "If I were to read a book at home, I'd tell my mom I wanted to read a book to her. Like, I read three chapter books to her." They all talked about showing people the pictures, telling them the story, or reading them a favorite book. Perhaps Frank said it best, capturing the secure comfort of the interpersonal connection: "Like Saturday and Sunday my mom reads to me and Friday…I feel great 'cause I can be in my bed."

Other social aspects were not mentioned directly, or maybe even consciously recognized by the children, but showed in their words and actions. They often leaned comfortably into me as I read with them one-on-one. In group readings, they often made eye contact with each other at funny parts and then laughed together. At times they pointed excitedly to passages or illustrations to show interesting parts to others in the group. All five children interspersed comments into the reading and listening activities, made predictions and gave opinions, though some more in one setting than another. Reading and talking provided some children with a means for dealing with unpleasant memories (e.g., sorrow over losing pets). For Nathan, reading one-on-one with me seemed to serve as a catalyst, piercing his quiet exterior to reveal the richness of his thoughts.

Power

Mastery of the reading process provided a feeling of power and control for some students as well. For Nathan that power came with his prior knowledge of the story's plot line and details. He was in control of the information and images to come. Alyssa's feeling of power developed

out of her confidence that she would use reading to increase her present level of knowledge as she aged. For Paul, power stemmed from control over the reading process itself. He knew how to read and how to learn more, clearly feeling power as his mastery: "[They] can't tell me what to do. I can read all I want to." LaKendra was going "to write a book" to produce her own reading material. Frank was the only one who was struggling with this feeling of control and mastery as a reader. He attributed this not having "got that much practice in school." His power came from his decoding strategies, which he used to read texts as he wished. He had no problem with just "running over" a word he did not know and moving along. While he felt more in control of his reading this way, the consequences for his comprehension were at times obvious.

These students seemed to be preoccupied with reading as "knowing words" rather than as comprehending ideas. Although they did not indicate they saw themselves as "makers of meaning," they did share their interpretations of the texts and the illustrations in socially meaningful ways, and they clearly remarked that the way to learn to read was simply by reading, echoing Peterson and Eeds (1990). Reading, therefore, provided the children the power to become still better readers. And for each child, becoming a better reader was a means to a variety of utilitarian ends: good grades, future jobs, information, and improvement in reading ability.

Pleasure

Pleasure or "fun" was also a common theme in the children's reasons to read. This connected again to Britton (1970/1993) and Vygotsky (1936/1986), both of whom viewed language as first and foremost pleasurable and social. The children viewed reading as "fun" and often approached it in a playful manner. Alyssa loved twisting her mouth around the sounds of Dr. Seuss. Frank and Nathan watched carefully for inconsistent details and made hilarious commentary on the characters' doings in the books we read together. Humor was an ever-present

factor in the reading. Reading well also brought out warm feelings of self-confidence and pride. LaKendra said it the most straightforwardly: "I'm proud. I get proud when I read!" The children enjoyed the attention and the security of reading or being read to from a familiar book. Reading also provided them with vicarious experiences—opportunities to imagine other worlds and possibilities for their lives.

One distinction they made I found both interesting and troubling. They saw fun and humor and sharing of books to be tied with children reading books, but ascribed less pleasurable purposes for adults' or even older children's reading of books. These "non-kids" read for their jobs or for information from the newspaper or to be knowledgeable when taking a test. In this way the children allude to Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) distinction between efferent and aesthetic readings in transactions with texts, between reading to take knowledge away from a text and reading for personal enjoyment. Paul was already seeing reading as becoming more efferently focused as evidenced by his comment about reading the weekly reader. The children seemed to believe that reading for fun was a kids' pastime, like playing in mud and riding your bike through puddles, something you outgrew as you became a grown-up and lived with adult responsibilities.

Performance

Through performance the children displayed knowledge and skills that might have otherwise gone unexplored. For example, reading allowed Frank to share with me what he knew about dinosaurs, and periscopes, and how a dagger was different from a knife. Paul connected his reading needs and interests with his passion for Nintendo games. Reading out loud to a group also provided an opportunity for the children to display vocabulary awareness and fluency. Paul liked to share books in this way, highlighting how fast he could read. His idea of sharing a book with his class was to "ask the teachers if I can go in front of everyone and read it."

This performance aspect brought risk as well. LaKendra worried about children "laughing at [her]" and stated, "I'm shy when I read out loud." Frank did not like reading in small group very much, because he would "get behind." Like Paul, Alyssa had no problems reading in front of a group, attributing this to having "been in a lot of swim meets" and having gotten over her nervousness. In classrooms we must be very careful to balance this need for performance with the reticence of some children to be exposed in what they view as their limitations. This concern with how other children view them makes obvious how young children internalize both others' perceptions of them and alternate purposes for reading. Nathan summed it up by saying, when you read "silently, then, um, you don't, nobody hears the words. When you're reading out loud, other people hear the words." Other people judge them as well. This was shown even in our group in the impatience the others showed at times towards Frank's slow and deliberate reading.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

This study supports Michel's (1994) contention that children have rich perceptions of learning to read and of themselves as readers that are influenced by their situated experiences. These wonderful children's voices have much to say to us if we listen. While the students know how they are doing in reading, their perceptions of reading and themselves as readers may not mirror our adult perceptions (Michel, 1994). By understanding what being a reader means to a young child we come closer to knowing her as a reader and closer to being able to guide her along her path. For example, LaKendra was a self-proclaimed "shy reader" but a gregarious child which hid that side of her from adult eyes. During a reading lesson I observed, she wandered around the room and held her book sideways, but she watched the chart the class was reading from and always responded when she was called on. Observing only these behaviors, and not talking to her directly, one might never know the intensely spontaneous engagement with which

she transacted with books at other times. Nathan, on the other hand, was extremely quiet during both whole and small group activities, but expressed humor, shared life experiences, and revealed his enjoyment with reading in one-on-one settings.

Educators must build on what children already know (Britton, 1970/1993; Delpit, 1995). Part of teaching children to read is listening to what they think reading is all about and balancing meeting those self-expressed needs while guiding them towards broader visions of the purposes and benefits of reading. Young and Beach (1997) indicated a need for teachers

> to develop sensitivity to children's emerging sense of being literate. If we attempt to teach reading or writing without attending to children's sense of self or how they interpret literate activity in settings like school, we overlook an essential, fundamental aspect of the children's literacy development. (p. 306)

Children's sense of self as a reader is an essential part of that knowledge base. By understanding not only the factual knowledge children possess but also their purposes for learning and definitions of themselves as learners, we will be better able to build a solid foundation together with them. We will better understand the institutionalized attitudes and behaviors they have already absorbed. For example, how do they define a "good reader?" Is it a fast decoder, a child who reads widely or one who knows what "genres" are? Is reading a set of skills and linear processes, metaphors that Gough (1995) promoted and Smith (1988) problematized, or a set of social and cultural practices, as articulated by researchers such as Bloome and Katz (1997) and Street (1993)?

By listening carefully to students and valuing their perceptions of themselves as readers and as experts on their reading, we can develop a clearer understanding of how they learn and how their perceptions shift as they move through the educational system. For example, will Frank

continue to connect reading with a feeling of "getting higher every second" as he progresses through a system that labels children who struggle with reading? How will Paul, who stated that children read for "fun" and adults read mainly for their jobs (e.g., dictionaries or teachers' guides), view reading as he grows out of childhood? Just as reading is a learned process (Bloome & Katz, 1997; Hade, 1997; Millard, 1994), so too are our constructs of "reading" and "reader" (Johnston, 1997), and the beliefs we hold about literacy (Cairney & Langbein, 1989), created in a sociocultural milieu. Remembering this, we can perhaps guide students like Paul to see that the pleasure of reading can extend into adulthood and that reading has intrinsic value beyond controlled activities such as weekly reader and history tests.

Holdaway (1979) wrote of the need for adults, who often express intense joy at early physical and oral language development, to remain models of the joyful richness of literacy and literature for children as the young people develop into ever more advanced readers. For him, "natural" learning was simply "learning with ideal reinforcement contingencies" (p. 16). Holdaway realized that if literacy is to become and remain a vital force in our lives, it must be personally meaningful and satisfying. To finds ways to make it so for children, it is essential that we as educators take the time to talk with them and observe them, and we must value them as people who have much to teach us just as we must model the pleasures of literacy for them. Although they studied adults, Morawski's and Brunhuber's (1993) recommendation that the approach to reading acquisition and improvement "be a holistic one [that would] address the development of students' reading abilities as well as their perceptions related to the reading process" (p. 44) applies especially to children's literacy development.

In this study I combined observational practices and the in-depth nature of the interview to attempt to get at these children's perceptions of reading and of themselves in the context of

reading. I believe that by observing and interviewing them both singly and in a small group, and by reading with them and listening to them read individually and in the group setting, I learned more of their insights than I would have through any one of these methods alone. More in-depth qualitative research needs to be done on children's perceptions of the reading process and of themselves as readers at all levels of schooling, especially with beginning and struggling readers.

> Individuals' perceptions of themselves as readers as well as their views of the reading process cannot help but play a major role in their reading development. Therefore, it is imperative that an understanding of these perceptions be reached and acted upon during reading instruction. (Morawski & Brunhuber, 1993, p. 45)

Since reading is basic to everything that is done in school, understanding how children view the reading process is central to educational research and teaching. Investigating through children's insights how they construct themselves as readers over time and how they are socially constructed by others as good readers, non-readers, slow readers, or struggling readers helps us in "unpacking the literacy practices in which we engage and to which we socialize students" (Bloome & Katz, 1997, p. 222). It helps us become more responsive literacy educators who can support children in becoming strong, positive, and lasting readers themselves.

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Appendix A

Interview questions for individual interviews

Questions 1-8 came from the Burke Reading Inventory (Hubbard & Power,1993); 9-12 and 15 were taken from Allen et al. (1993); and 13-14 and 16-25 were developed by the researcher.

1. When you are reading and you come to something you do not know, what do you do?

   Do you ever do something else?

2. Who is a good reader you know?

3. What makes him or her a good reader?

4. Do you think that she or he ever comes to something she or he does not know when she or he reads?

5. Yes - When she or he does come to something she or he does not know what do you think she or he does about it?

   No - Suppose that she or he does come to something that she or he does not know. Pretend what you think she or he does about it.

6. If you knew that someone was having difficulty reading, how would you help that person? Suppose I were having difficulty. How would/could you help me?

7. What would a teacher do to help that person?

8. How did you learn to read? What did you or someone else do to help you learn?

9. What are you learning to do in reading now?

10. How are you learning it? Who is helping you?

11. What would you like to do next as a reader?

    What would you like to do better as a reader?

12. How do you think you will learn it? Will anyone help you?

Appendix A (continued)

13. Why do you think people read? What are some reasons adults have for reading?
14. What about kids? What about you? Why do you read?
15. What kinds of things will you need to read or want to read when you are a grown-up?

    For your job?
16. How good a reader are you? What kind of reader are you?

    What do you think of yourself as a reader?
17. What do you like about reading?
18. What would you miss if you couldn't read?
19. When during the day do you read?
20. What do you read?
21. How often do you read?
22. Where do you like to read?
23. How do you like to share books you read with others?

    Do you like to talk about books you read?
24. How do you feel when you read? Or when you share books?
25. How do you feel when someone reads to you?

Appendix B

Group Interview Questions

Questions 1-5, 11-13, 15 were asked on 5/29/97 and questions 6-10 and 14 on 5/30/97.

1. What is more important in reading: saying all the words or understanding what's going on in the story? (Does what's important change depending on the situation? - not asked)
2. What makes someone a good reader?
3. How important is it to be a good reader?
4. How can you improve your own reading? How can a person help someone else get better at reading?
5. How does reading silently to yourself compare with reading aloud to a group or with a group?
6. What is the difference between what adults read and what kids read?
7. What is the difference between how adults feel about reading and how kids feel about reading?
8. What is the purpose of reading for you? For other children? For adults?
9. Why do you read?
10. What do you like to read?
11. How do you show it when you enjoy reading or when you like a book?
12. When is the best time to read?
13. Where is the best place to read?
14. What is the best way to share a book?
15. How do you feel about reading yourself and being read to?

Appendix C

Reading Where the Wild Things Are (Sendak, 1963/1988) with LaKendra

LaKendra sorted through the pile, whispering some titles and reading others out loud. Finding Where the Wild Things Are, she exclaimed, "I want to hear it!" As soon as I began to read, LaKendra was laughing at the images in this unfamiliar book. She made her best mad face to imitate Max. We laughed about his teddy bear hanging from the hanger. "I think he's trying to kill his dog!" she cried, but her laughter showed she was not concerned. When Max was sent to bed without his supper, she sympathized: "I'll bet he was hungry!" When the forest began to grow, she exclaimed, "Oh." And when it grew some more, she ventured a prediction: "It's gonna get bigger." She smiled when her prediction came true. "There's the sea," she whispered. Only later would I find out how much she loved the ocean. She commented often on the drawings, and I mentioned the book won an award. When he got to the land of the wild things, LaKendra said, "He look like he a wild thing, too!" She was speechless at first at the gnashing of terrible teeth, rolling of terrible eyes and showing of terrible claws. The illustration took her full concentration, then she made connections: "Oooh! We got that one on our [reading] book!" Out popped her proud and expressive smile. Pointing and laughing, she called my attention to Max. "They're hanging on trees!" "Look at his toenails!" She pointed Max out to me again as he rode atop the barefoot monster. "Look at the guy in the back!" she laughed. Getting caught up in the story, she said only, "He's going home" as Max shoved off from the land of the wild things. She pointed to his supper: "There it is - over there." As I read, "And it was still hot, " she looked puzzled. "And how long has he been gone?" she asked. "What do you think?" I asked. "I think his mom just brought it in." We talked about our favorite scenes. Then LaKendra pointed to the other books I had brought: "Are these books to read?" she asked, ready to enter another world of wonders.

Appendix D

Nathan's personal narrative about his pets

"Had a whole bunch of them. Some of them, we couldn't keep one because we had an apartment. We had let our friend keep them and then my other one, he was, um, a, um a pit bull, and we let our friends keep her and then they tried to leave her on a railroad track . . . Somebody came and got her . . . And my other one it was a big dog, but it was a puppy and my friend was scared of him. He thought it was a big dog. He thought it was a full grown dog, but it was a big ol' puppy. And he said: 'Nice doggy, nice doggy,' um, when we was getting off the bus and then, um, we had to give him, her away—her name was Daisy—because we was still in the apartment. Then when we moved into the house, my dog Sparkle got hit by a car."

Appendix E

Children's spontaneous discussion of Braille

[They think everybody can learn to read, "unless it's sign language."]

Alyssa: Only, they can.

Nathan: If you're blind and you're not blind you don't know how to read what they're reading. [He goes on to add:] They held with their hands.

Alyssa: And they're dots.

LaKendra: How can they, how can they see the, um, words?

Paul: Some blind people can see some things.

Alyssa: They feel them.

Nathan: I wonder how they feel them. I know they feel them with their hands.

LaKendra: And they figure out them.

Alyssa: They use dots for letters.

Table 1

Research Participants Described by Gender, Ethnicity and General Identified Reading Ability

	Gender	Ethnicity	General School-Identified Reading Ability
LaKendra	Female	African American	Above Average
Nathan	Male	African American	Average (on grade level)
Frank	Male	European American	Below Average
Paul	Male	European American	Average (on grade level)
Alyssa	Female	European American	High (identified as "gifted")

Table 2

Five Broad Categories Related to Purposes for and Perceptions of Reading:

Key Topics Addressed in Each Category, and Sample Statements From the Children

Purposes/ Perceptions	Key topics addressed	Sample statements for each broad category
1. Practice	to read longer and harder words	"Read harder books than I'm doing in school, that don't have words like cat and that stuff."
	to read longer books	"I'd like to read a long book, chapter book like Goosebumps."
	to learn more words	"Know lots of big, big, big words."
	to develop decoding skills	"First you got to learn about vowels and sounds, how they go in order."
2. People	to connect interpersonally	"I like when someone read[s] to me, and then when I'm done with the book, I read it to them."
	to share experiences	"[M]y dog Sparkle got hit by a car."
	to share opinions	"I don't like amphibians. They feel weird."
	to experience comfort and security	"Like Saturday and Sunday my mom reads to me and Friday . . . I feel great 'cause I can be in my bed."

Categories, key topics, and sample statements continued...

Purposes/ Perceptions	Key topics addressed	Sample statements for each broad category
3. Power		
• Utilitarian means to an end	to aide future job	"[I]f she couldn't read the teacher book, then she wouldn't know what to do."
	to get good grades	"Well if they're a student, like teenager, they would get very, very good grades if they, um, had, they were doing reading."
	to improve reading	"[A]ll of them teach you how to read."
	to get information	"[People] read, um, to tell them what happened in another state"
• Control over the learning environment	to decode	"If it's a Dr. Seuss book, I would think of words that rhyme with the other word that I just said."
	to author own materials	"I want to write a book, an animal book."
	to control own reading	"You can't tell me what to do. I can read all I want."
	to control information	"I know what he's gonna get. I'm not telling you!"

Categories, key topics, and sample statements continued...

Purposes/ Perceptions	Key topics addressed	Sample statements for each broad category
4. Personal pleasure	to have fun	"Kids read because it's fun."
	to aide confidence and experience pride	"I'm proud. I get proud when I read."
	to enjoy humor and language	"'Cause sometimes books are funny . . . and I like those."
	to live vicariously	"Well, if my mother asked me, I'd say, 'Nothing' She'd say, 'You, I know you did something.' She would know, 'cause she would know I was, uh, 'cause I was kind of scared."
5. Performance	to display knowledge	"Patrick didn't think this dinosaur ate leaves . . . He doesn't. He eats meat."
	to display skills	"I like to ask my teacher if I can go in front . . . and read it."
	to face risk	"They might laugh at me."